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H. F. Matthews, Career Envoy, Dies at Age 87

By J. Y. Smith
Washington Post Staff Writer

H. Freeman Matthews, 87, a retired Foreign Service officer who was ambassador to three countries and who later was a member of the CIA's Board of National Estimates, died Oct. 19 at his home in Washington. He had circulatory ailments.

Mr. Matthews was commissioned in the Foreign Service in 1924 and he retired from it in 1962. From then until 1968, he was a member of the Board of Estimates, which reports to the president on political and security tensions in various foreign countries.

In the course of his career, Mr. Matthews was one of the most highly respected members of the Foreign Service. In 1956, when the personal rank of career ambassador was established, he was one of the first four diplomats to receive it. In 1972, he received the American Foreign Service Association Cup for his "outstanding contributions to the conduct of the foreign relations of the United States."

He was ambassador to Sweden from 1947 to 1950, deputy undersecretary of state for political affairs from 1950 to 1953, ambassador to The Netherlands from 1953 to 1957, and ambassador to Austria from 1957 until he retired.

During and after World War II, he had a number of sensitive assignments in Washington and abroad. He was in the U.S. embassy in Paris from 1937 to 1939. He then went to Madrid to help open the first American embassy to the Spanish government of Gen. Francisco Franco in the aftermath of the Spanish civil war.

Back in France after the outbreak of the world war, he accompanied the French government when it fled from Paris to Bordeaux in 1940 to escape the advancing Germans. He later was charge d'affaires of the U.S. embassy to the government of Marshal Petain in Vichy in the unoccupied part of France.

Mr. Matthews next served in London, where he was a senior political adviser to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower during the planning of the U.S. landings in French North Africa. In 1943, he was ordered to Washington and for the next four years was director of the Office of European Affairs in the State Department.

He was one in a small group of experts chosen to accompany then President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the critical meetings of allied leaders at Cairo and Yalta. He accompanied then President Harry S. Truman to the "Big Four" conference in Potsdam outside Berlin near the end of the war and he attended "Big Four" foreign ministers meetings in Paris and Moscow during the onset of the cold war.

For his work as a member of the Board of National Estimates at the CIA, Mr. Matthews was awarded the Intelligence Medal of Merit. During his years on the board, he also was chairman of the U.S. section of the U.S.-Canadian Joint Board on Defense.

Mr. Matthews was born in Baltimore. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Princeton University and then studied in Paris at the prestigious Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques. In 1962, he received an honorary doctorate of laws from Princeton.

His first assignment as a Foreign Service officer was to Budapest, Hungary. From 1926 to 1930, he was in Bogota, Colombia, and from 1930 to 1933 he was in the Latin American Division in the State Department. He then went to Havana and remained in Cuba until he was sent to Paris in 1937.

Mr. Matthews was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church, Lafayette Square. In retirement, he wrote his memoirs, which were published privately.

His first wife, Elizabeth Luke Matthews, died in 1955. His second wife, the former Helen Skouland, died in 1966.

Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth M. Matthews of Washington; two children by his first marriage, H. Freeman Jr., of Chevy Chase and Thomas Luke, of San Rafael, Calif., and seven grandchildren.

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